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A  
GLANCE

AT  
THE HISTORY  
OF

CHRISTIANITY,

AND

OF ENGLISH

NONCONFORMITY.

THIRD EDITION,

with additional Notes:

AND

A POSTSCRIPT

ON THE

Present Movement in the East.

By James Bicheno, M. A.

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### ADVERTISEMENT.

*I AM rather at a loss what to say about the publication of the following pages. I dislike apologies on such occasions, and yet, I not sure but that some are necessary.*

*The following thoughts were delivered on Friday last, (three or four short sentences, and notes excepted) at the setting apart of MR. JOHN HOLLOWAY to the pastoral office, over a congregation of Protestant Dissenters, at Reading. The interlocutory part is omitted.*

*I publish, more to shew respect to my friends, than to gratify private inclination; and submit to their opinions rather than to my own convictions.*

*In answer to my objections, some have said, "Though it is  
" but a GLANCE, yet it may be useful; and it is sometimes  
" pleasant to travel Post through a country we have before  
" explored."—And others urged its BREVITY as a principal  
recommendation. "Many of us" said they "have not money  
" to buy large books, and most of us less time to read them:  
" at any rate it may be useful to our young people, and*



“ serve to stir up attention to a subject which, though of  
“ no small importance for christians to be well acquainted  
“ with, yet, of late, has been too much neglected. It may  
“ excite to the reading of more elaborate productions.”

*To afford help to any, and to contribute one argument, or  
to awaken one idea, which may lead the attention of christ-  
ians to those enquiries with which the peace, and prosperity  
of Christ's kingdom are so nearly connected; especially the at-  
tention of our children, whom we are concerned to see, first  
sincere Christians, and, next to that, enlightened, conscientious  
Dissenters, would yield to my heart the purest pleasure.*

*That my friends may not be mistaken in their expectations,  
and that the rising generation may imitate the virtues of their  
ancestors, whose memory is sweet in all our churches, is the  
ardent prayer of*

NEWBURY,

J. B.

JUNE 14th, 1798.



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GLANCE, &c.

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**W**HEN the passover was instituted, and commanded to be observed for an ordinance to the people of Israel, and to their sons, for ever, the injunction of Moses was, *And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.\**

The excellence of every religious observance is that it has the authority of God, and can be traced up to his appointment; and every christian ought to be able to give a reason, grounded on God's word, for all his religious services. Do the young people of this assembly, or do any, who are strangers to our practices, enquire, *What mean ye by this service?* Why do you dissent from the religious establishment of the country in which you live: and, in the ordination of your ministers, follow a practice so different from that which generally prevails? Be assured we do not do it on slight and trifling grounds, and for the sake of separation. I hope we are able to give good reasons for our

\* Ex. xii. 26, 27.

conduct, and to justify ourselves against the charge of schism; from the laws and testimonies of JESUS CHRIST—the example of the first Christians—and of the best of men in succeeding generations.\*

We cannot now enter at large, into these enquiries, nor descend to particulars; but must confine ourselves to a few cursory hints, relative to the origin of our dissenting churches, and the reasons for our order.—A glance at the history of christianity is necessary.

Our blessed Lord having died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, said to his disciples, just before his ascension to the right hand of his Father, *All power is given unto me in heaven, and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*† And the apostle Paul declares, respecting him, that *the Father of Glory hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church.*‡

In the church of Christ there is no other sovereign, or lawgiver but himself. To him, in matters of religion and conscience, are his disciples subject, and to him, at his second coming, must all give an account. This should deeply impress, and affect, every christian's mind.—Jesus Christ is sovereign in his church, and in all spiritual concerns. None share with him, either in his legislative or his judicial authority, and at his bar must I stand, to answer for my conduct as a subject of his kingdom!

But, is Jesus Christ a King; and did he again, and again, assert his supreme and sole authority over his church? That his disciples, by misunderstanding the

\* Twogood's letters, pp. 87—90.

† Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

‡ Eph. i. 22.

nature of his kingdom, might not be led into fatal mistakes, he, before his departure from the earth, dropped some important hints for the regulation of their conduct. *My kingdom, said he, is not of this world.—Render unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things which are God's.—All that take the sword shall perish with the sword.\**

The Apostles thoroughly understood their master, and taught and practised accordingly. In civil matters, they taught submission to the civil magistrate; and enjoined christians to *render to all their dues; Tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.†* With forms of government, and political affairs, they did not, as the apostles of Christ, at all intermeddle. This was no part of their special mission; but all these things were left to the will and wisdom of men; only teaching them to *owe no man any thing but to love one another,‡* and to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.§* But in all things pertaining to religion and conscience they professed, and taught, and practised, independence on all but God, and their language was, *We ought to obey God rather than men.||* Whatever the pleasure of the emperors, and governors, or other magistrates might be, and whatever the laws, and customs, or established religions of the countries, in which they resided, or sojourned; or whatever hazards they might run, whatever losses sustain, and sufferings endure, they still adhered to that great principle of liberty which they had learned from Christ, *Call no man your father*

\* John, xviii. 36. Matt. xxii. 21. xxvi. 52.

† Rom, xiii. 7. ‡ xiii. 8. § Eph. iv. 1—3. || Acts, v. 29.



*upon the earth, for one is your Father who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ.\**

Happy would it have been if all that have assumed the christian name had trod in their steps, and remembered that the kingdom of Christ is *not of this world*, and that the subjects of it should be actuated by a very different spirit from that which influences the *princes of the gentiles*.† But the mystery of iniquity soon began to work. The Apostle Paul complained of it in his days; but *the man of sin* was not yet revealed, in perfection, nor till some ages afterward.‡ In the first ages of christianity, all the churches of Christ were independent, and each one chose its own pastor or bishop, and officers, and regulated its own concerns; owning no authority in spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs, but that of Jesus Christ. Their union was only a union of principles and love; not of worldly policy, or magisterial coercion. The truth of this all history attests.§ In those days no

\* Matt. xxiii. 9, 10. † xx. 25. ‡ II. Thess. ii. 3—12.

§ Mosheim, (though he endeavours to apologize for later innovations) says, "In those early times every christian church consisted of the *people*, their *leaders*, and the *ministers*, and *deacons*—The people were undoubtedly the first in authority; for the apostles shewed, by their own example, that nothing of moment was to be carried on, or determined, without the consent of the assembly, (Acts, i. 15. vi. 3. xv. 4. xxi. 22.) and such a method was both prudent and necessary in those early times."

"It was therefore the assembly of the people which chose their own rulers and teachers, or received them, by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others. The same people rejected or confirmed by their suffrages, the laws, that were proposed, by their rulers to the assembly." Vol. I. p. 80. 8vo. ed. 1774. See also p. 145.

Dupin, (a catholic) speaking of the three first centuries, says of the christians of those times, "They were very careful to chuse ministers whose life and manners were blameless. After the death of those who were appointed by the apostles, the people chose them." Vol. II. p. 73. 12mo. ed. 1716.

one minister pretended to more authority than another. Jesus was their master and all they were brethren.

But, early in the *fourth* century, when the roman emperors became christians, or professed to be so, and the church enjoyed the smiles of the court; and peace, and riches, and honors, followed, then its original simplicity and liberty soon vanished and gave place to pride, ambition, unprofitable ceremonies and vain pomp—in a word, to conformity to the world and pagan superstitions. To facilitate the conversion of the heathen nations, and to make the new yoke, imposed by the emperors, sit as easy as imposition would allow, christianity was assimilated, as much as possible, to their pagan prejudices; and we have seen what a christianity they fabricated; and the bloody page of history informs us what sort of christians the nations have been.\*

\* Mosheim, vol. I. pp. 277, 289, 311, 319.

Pope Gregory, writing to Austin, (A. D. 601.) who was making proselytes in Britain, does not satisfy himself with directing him “not to destroy, but to reserve for the worship of God, the profane places where the Saxons had worshipped their idols; but he would have him to treat the more profane usages, rites, and ceremonies of the pagans, in the same manner, that is, not to abolish, but to sanctify them, by changing the end for which they were instituted, and introduce them, thus sanctified, into the christian worship.” This he specifies in a particular ceremony; “Whereas it is the custom, says he, among the Saxons, to slay abundance of oxen, and sacrifice them to the devil, you must not abolish that custom, but appoint a new festival to be kept, either on the day of the consecration of their churches, or on the birth-day of the saints whose reliques are deposited there; and on these days the Saxons may be allowed to make arbours round the temples, changed into churches, to kill their oxen, and to feast, as they did while they were yet pagans; only they shall offer their thanks and praises, not to the devil, but to God.” Bower’s “Hist. of the Popes” vol. II. p. 523. 4to. ed.

It was in this manner, as well as by the sword, that the apostate church, aided by the civil power of all the kingdoms of Europe, made

The bishops or pastors, were preferred according to the dignity of the cities in which they resided, and

profelytes to *their* christianity, and hence all that carnal policy, and all those absurdities, and pagan superstitions which are to be found, more or less, in all churches, popish and protestant; and which have so connected and mingled themselves with the pure and simple doctrine of Christ, that it requires more attention to distinguish the one from the other than most, particularly our modern, would-be, philosophers, are willing to bestow: and hence, freedom of thought no sooner becomes the fashion of the times, than infidelity assumes the place of implicit faith. The one indeed is as good as the other; or the latter, perhaps, is the least mischievous.

This general corruption of all churches calls to my recollection the striking reflection of Dr. HARTLEY, in his '*Observations on Man*' part II. prop. 82. whose sentiments seem verifying in the destinies of Europe: "The civil and ecclesiastical powers are so interwoven and cemented together, in all the countries of christendom, that if the first fall the last must fall also."

"But there are many prophecies which declare the fall of the ecclesiastical powers of the christian world. And though each church seems to flatter itself, with the hopes of being exempted; yet it is very plain that the prophetic characters belong to all. They have all lost the true, pure, simple religion; and teach for doctrines the commandments of men. They are all merchants of the earth and have set up a kingdom of this world.—They have all a dogmatizing spirit, and persecute such as do not receive their mark, and worship the image which they have set up.—They have all received money, like Gehazi; and therefore the leprosy of Naaman will cleave to them, and their seed for ever." etc, etc.

If we would further see what has been done to assimilate Christianity to heathenism, we must take a view of the old pagan superstitions, and compare them with those of the corrupted churches. The roman Emperor was the *Pontifex Maximus*, or *High Priest*; and, as the head of the pagan church in the roman empire, had divine honors and oblations paid to him; thus, though JESUS CHRIST is the only head, the only King and High Priest, whom the Father hath set over his church, yet a share in those honors has been usurped by others.

And, had the heathens, besides their supreme *Jupiter*, divers inferior deities, gods and goddesses, to whom they erected altars and statues, and dedicated temples, days and feasts; and who were supposed to be the peculiar patrons of certain countries, cities, and orders of men? so the corrupted christian churches have had gods and gods



hence the bishops of Rome and Constantinople (which was now become an imperial residence and the rival

of so many, and lords many. Besides their *Sancta Maria*, the queen of heaven and mother of God, and a long *et cætera*, they have had their *St. George*, for England; *St. Denis*, for France; *St. Mark*, for Venice; *St. Nicolas*, for the mariner; *St. Windoline*, for the shepherd; *St. Magdalene*, for the courtesan, etc. Did the heathen idolators build their temples east and west, consecrating, with many prayers and ceremonies, first the ground, and then the temple; worshipping towards the east, with many antic postures and gestures? Had they their *asperges*, sprinkling themselves at the temple door; their processions, shrines, incense, tapers, and music, vocal and instrumental? So the apostate followers of Jesus, have turned the simple worship of the gospel into a pantomime; and in the place of that worship of God *in spirit and in truth*, which the Savior taught, they have substituted the vanities of heathenism.

And, as among idolators, they had their superior and inferior priests, so these christians. The pagans had their *Flamins* and *Arch-flamins*, for sacerdotal service, in their provinces and diocesses; and inferior priests, distinguished by dignified names, tonsures, orders, and habits. The dignified priests were those that attended on the capital temples, as the proper priests of Jupiter, Apollo, etc. while the more inferior priests had the care of the sacred celebrations. In imitation of these the debauched christian church began now to have her bishops and arch-bishops, for sacerdotal service, in the provinces and diocesses of the roman empire; and inferior clergy, distinguished, too, by dignified names, tonsures, orders, and habits. The dignified clergy were those that attained the capital, or cathedral churches, as Deans, Chapters, Prebends and Arch-deacons; and the more inferior priests (as the *teachers* now affected to call themselves) had the care of the sacred celebrations in the *Cures* or Parishes. The heathen priests had their proper habits, and particular vestments, for their religious service, as the *albes*, *tunics* and *amicts*; so now the christian priests assumed particular habits for their ministrations, and to distinguish their orders, as surplices or albes, chasubles or tunics, etc. etc.

The heathens had their religious festivals, in honor of their gods, in commemoration of the building their temples, etc. and as these, most certainly could not be altogether given up, the matter has been compromised. Every parish has had its annual wake or festival, in commemoration of the consecration of its church, and in honor of its particular saint. And for their *Saturnalia*, which they used to celebrate in December, with riot and debauchery, adorning their temples and

of Rome) had a long and violent contention for pre-eminence.\* The bishop of Rome prevailed, especially in these western parts, and rose from one degree of power and authority to another, till he assumed universal dominion in church and state; and became (after the dissolution of the western empire, the fall of the Roman Cæsars, in 476, and the after reduction of Italy to a province) that man of sin, foretold by the apostle Paul, that sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is a god;† for now he that had “let,” and retarded, his rise, was “taken out of the way.”‡

Now tyranny and corruption, idolatry and superstition universally prevailed, and all the kingdoms of Europe, which the barbarous nations had erected on the ruins of the western empire, gave their power to the beast.§ Bloody laws were enacted to suppress all freedom of enquiry and liberty of worship.¶ Monks

houses with green boughs, they have had their christmas sports; for their *Floralia*, on Mayday, when their young people, of both sexes, with great jollity, scattered boughs and flowers, and danced about may-poles; they have had the feast of Philip and Jacob, celebrated in the same way; for the loss of their *Paleia*, or Shepherds feast, on Midsummer-day, they have been compensated by a revel in honor of John the Baptist; and for their *Panathenia*, a feast to all their gods, they have enjoyed the feast of All-saints, and so of the rest. See DE LAUNE's *Image of the Beast*.

All this pride, and folly, and idleness, has been called “OUR HOLY RELIGION!!!” and many, having mistaken it for genuine Christianity, have thus been the easy prey of infidelity: — but, we have not so learnt Christ.

\* Dupin, vol. II. p. 163. Mosheim, vol. I. pp. 288, 370.

† II. Thess. ii. 3—12.

‡ Puffendorf's Intro. vol. I. p. 404. Mosheim, vol. I. pp. 243, 286.

§ Rev. xvii. 13.

¶ Justinian Code. Justinian in the beginning of his reign (A. D. 529.) published an edict concerning his faith, and made it even banishment from the roman territory for any to dare to dissent from it. This

overran the earth, and superstition extended itself on every side. Religion lay expiring under a motley and enormous heap of superstitious inventions, and had neither the courage, nor the force, to raise her head, or to display her native charms, to a darkened and deluded world——The christians of the seventh century, more than those that went before them, multiplied the objects of their devotion, and paid divine homage to the pretended remains of the cross, to the images of the saints, and to dead mens bones; and in the year 787 idolatry was firmly established by the solemn decree of the second council of Nice.\*

The business of professing christians was now, not to search the scriptures, and walk according to this rule, but to send to Rome to learn the mind of the pope, and his conclave, and to obey the bulls and edicts of this man of sin, that had set himself up for the vicar

faith was acknowledged by the pope to be *the only true faith*. This law, in its pains and penalties, has been the model of later *Acts of Uniformity* and *Test laws*, “all, whether Jews, Gentiles, or Christians, who did not, within three months, embrace and profess the catholic faith, were declared infamous, and as such, excluded from all employments, civil and military; rendered incapable of leaving any thing by will, and their estates confiscated, whether real or personal.” Bower’s ‘*Lives of the Popes*’ vol II. p. 334. ‘*Illustr. of Proph.*’ vol. II. p. 369.

About this time, I think, the antichristian monster was so matured, by the laws of Justinian, and the usurpations and corruptions of the church of Rome, that it is from this period that his 1260 years reign are to be dated. What is now passing in Europe, with the late fall of the papacy, favors this hypothesis. See the argument which supports this in ‘*The Signs of the Times*,’ part I. by the Author.

\* Dupin, vol. II. pp. 309—311. Mosheim, vol. II. pp. 20, 93.

It was in the eighth century that the bishops of Rome were exalted, by the kings of France, to the rank of temporal princes. France set them up; France, all along, has been their principal champion; and France has pulled them down!!!



of Christ, and the vicegerent of God. Black darkness succeeded, and, for some centuries, we scarcely discern a ray of light.\* The priests were every thing, and the people nothing. All freedom of enquiry and all liberty of worship, and of church government, were lost; and the church, which bore the name of Christ, was become a deformed and ravenous monster.† But God did not leave himself without witnesses. Here and there, there were a few who did not worship the beast; particularly the Vaudois in the valleys of Piedmont.‡ But these could hardly be called a visible church. They were hid. The temple was shut, (Rev. xi. 1. 2. 19. xv. 5.) and the gentiles, the spurious christians, possessed the outward court, and none could enter the temple of God but by stealth.

But in the darkest ages there were a few to bear witness for the truth, and to die for Christ; and in the twelfth century the light began to increase, though but slowly. Now the Waldenses and Albigenses, in the south of France and the north of Italy, began to spread that light, which the enemies of Christ could never extinguish, although they slaughtered a million of its propagators.§

\* "Ignorance, vice and irregularity, prevailed in the greater part of the world. It is true, there have been disorders in all ages; but it cannot be said with any shew of truth, that they were equal to those of the tenth century—that they spread so far or were so universal." Dupin, vol. III. p. 55.

† Rev. xiii. 1—10. ‡ Mosheim, vol. II. p. 452.

§ Mosheim, vol. II. pp. 451—455. vol. III. pp. 190, 272. Dupin, vol. III. pp. 112, 113, 139—141, 189—195. vol. IV. pp. 58—60. § vol. III. pp. 166—168. Neal's 'Hist. of the Pur.' pp. 2—4. Crossbey's 'Hist. of the Bapt.' vol. 1. pp. 2—13.

It should be also observed that this bright and morning star of the Reformation, not only denied the pope's supremacy, but was against any person's assuming the title and authority of being the head of the church, asserting that it is blasphemy to call any, head of the church.

In the fourteenth century Wickliff rekindled the light of the Gospel in England. He translated the Bible into English; he denied the pope's supremacy; he condemned episcopacy as being a creature set up by princes; he was for having ministers maintained by the voluntary subscriptions of the people, and not by tythes; and was against IMPOSING prescribed forms of prayer. [See the last note & at the bottom of the preceding page.]

In the fifteenth century John Hufs and Jerome of Prague, boldly attacked the vices of the clergy, and bravely withstood the corruptions of Rome, and even recommended in an open and public manner, the writings and opinions of Wickliff.\*

but Jesus Christ; and that in the sacrament of orders (as then called) there ought to be only two degrees, *presbyters* or *bishops*, and *deacons*.

I might, perhaps, be thought to have given too partial an account of the opinions maintained by this eminent reformer, if I were to omit what has induced some to conclude that, in the latter part of his life, at least, he opposed infant baptism, and on account of which he has been esteemed, by some as the Father of the *english* Baptists. — *Thomas Waldensis*, who reckons the errors of Wickliff to have been eighty, puts down his denial of infant baptism as one, (*De Bapt. Sac. Tit. 5. chap. 3.*) and on this account calls him one of the seven heads which came out of the bottomless pit, and says "That he (Wickliff) doth positively assert that children are not to be sacramentally baptized." *Joseph Virecomes* reckons Wickliff among those who opposed infant baptism (*De Rit. Bapt. lib. ii. chap. 1.*). According to *Crosbey* he taught what struck at the root of *popish* infant baptism, and what indeed led many of his admirers, both in England, and Germany, to renounce the baptism of infants altogether. He taught "That wise men leave that as impertinent which is not *plainly* expressed in scripture" — "That those are fools and presumptuous which affirm such infants not to be saved, which die without baptism." And he denied "That all sins are abolished in baptism; that baptism does not confer but only signifies grace, which was given before." Fuller's 'Church hist.' pp. 131—135. A Wald. art. 35. *Crosbey's* 'Hist. of the Bapt.' vol. I. pp. 8—13. *Mosheim*. vol. III. pp. 166—168. *Burnet's* 'Hist. of the Reform.' vol. I. pp. 23, 110. *Neal's* 'Hist. of the Pu.' vol. I. pp. 2—4. \* *Mosheim*, vol. III. p. 230.

In the following age, what is called the *great reformation* broke forth, and many countries of Europe separated themselves from the communion of Rome. But, alas! this was partial and very defective; such as might have been expected from the darkness of the times, and from the imperfections, the situations, the passions and interests of the principal actors in it. Those with whom the power lay, were arbitrary princes, and dignified churchmen; men brought up in darkness and tyranny, and whose eyes were not able, at once, to bear the full light. Our Henry the VIII. by whom the Reformation was begun in this country, was governed by no principle of religion; it was in resentment that he threw off the supremacy of the pope, and assumed it himself. This presumption created some surprise, and the clergy, especially, were startled at the idea of a layman's pretending to be the head of the Church, yet nevertheless, both the convocation and parliament, in the year 1534, declared him to be the sole and supreme head of the *church of England, next and immediately under Christ*; and the power, which the pope had formerly exercised, over the clergy and people of England, was transferred to the king.\*

In the next reign (Ed. VI.) the Reformation advanced: but the sole authority of Christ in his Church, and the rights of conscience, were never acknowledged, but the contrary supported by the canons and articles of the church, and by acts of parliament. Some, indeed contended for these, and for farther reformation from popery, but all they met with was contempt and persecution—In Elizabeth's reign these were called *puritans*, and in later times they have been denominated

\* Burnet's Hist. Reform. vol. I. pp. 136—144. Neal's Hist. Pu. vol. I. pp. 7, 8. Twogood's letters, p. 29.



*Nonconformists and Dissenters.\**

The first presbyterian church in England, was erected at Wandsworth, near London, in the year 1572.†

The first independent, or congregational Church, in this country, was founded in the year 1616, of which Mr. Henry Jacob was chosen pastor.‡ Some of this church being convinced that baptism was not to be administered to infants, but to such only as professed faith in Christ, desired to be dismissed, and to be allowed to form a distinct congregation. The Church agreeing to allow them this liberty, they parted in a friendly manner, and, on Sept. 12, 1633, laid the foundation of the first Baptist Church in England, having Mr. John Spilsbury for their pastor.§ At the present time there are, of the three denominations, in England, about 1500 churches, of which about 400 are of the Baptist denomination.

Cruel and bloody statutes have been enacted against the advocates for farther reformation and for the right of private judgment. Uniformity has been insisted on, and many of our ancestors have suffered and died for a good conscience.¶ In the days of Charles II. (A. D.

\* Though the early Puritans were for a much greater reformation from popery than the court approved, and maintained the holy scriptures to be a standard of *discipline*, as well as *doctrine*, yet it must be acknowledged they were most of them, for uniformity in their own way, and but few indeed in that dawn of light, perceived the right of private judgment, nor was it ever acknowledged by any *body of men*, in this country, till the rise of our Independent and Baptist Churches; nor did even these advocates for toleration and the rights of conscience extend their views, at first, quite commensurate with the liberty of the Gospel.—The evidence of these rights has been as the morning light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Neal, vol. I. p. 96. vol II. pp. 207, 212. † vol. I. p. 202. ‡ p. 476.

§ Crossbey, vol. I. pp. 147–149.

¶ In the year 1559 an act was passed, entitled “*An act for the uniformity of Common Prayer, and service in the church, and administration of the sacraments.*” This statute which has been the occasion of

1662) *two thousand* godly ministers, who could not subscribe to every word in the Prayer Book, and bend their consciences to the tyranny of the times, were cast out of the church, and forced into dissent; one from this town (Reading) Mr. Christ. Fowler, vicar of St. Mary's; and more than 20 through this county. The lot of these 2000 worthies was, that they and their followers were persecuted by statute after statute, till thousands of the worthiest families in the kingdom were reduced to beggary and ruin.\*

The principal reasons for the nonconformity of these christian worthies, and of the dissenters of the present times may be reduced to seven. 1. The frame and constitution of the established church, it being national. 2. The officers of it; many of whom the scriptures know nothing.† 3. The mode of worship. 4. The ceremonies. 5. The terms of admission to membership, and to the ministry. 6. The choice of ministers; they being most of them imposed by strangers. Out of 9,284 parish churches 3,845 are lay fees. 7. The discipline of the church. There are indeed, in the present day, two or three other reasons, which, although they are not general, are sometimes the occasions of dissent, particularly among our respectable friends the methodists, viz. the heterodoxy, or inattention, of some of the established clergy, and the im-

so much calamity to conscientious dissenters; as well as a snare to many conformists; may be seen at the beginning of every Common Prayer Book.

\* Neal, vol. II. pp. 624, 632--636. Palmer's Introd. to Noncon. Mem. pp 31--34. Burnet's Hist. of his own Times, vol. I. p. 279.

† There are in England, 2 Arch-bishops; 25 Bishops; 26 Deanries; 60 Arch-deaconries; 554 Dignities and Prebends, besides 9284 Rectories, Vicarages, etc, etc, etc.

morality of others.\*

The consequences of the act for the uniformity of *common prayers* in 1662, by which so many godly men were cast out of the church, and of the other laws against dissenters, were dreadful to thousands of the most upright men. According to the best computation, the dissenters suffered from fines, and in other ways, in the short space of three years only, the loss of two millions of property; Mr. Jeremy White collected the *names* of 60,000 persons who suffered, on a religious account, between the years 1660 and 1689, the period of the glorious revolution; 5000 of whom died in prison. But such was the fury of their enemies that about 8000 perished in whole.† By that revolution, never to be forgotten, and the toleration which followed, the dissenters were delivered from the cruel persecutions which had afflicted them for so long a time; and since which, a degree of religious liberty has been enjoyed, before unknown in this country; and our fathers have proved that, in their dissent, they were actuated only by a good conscience; and I hope, and believe, that their children will always prove, by their reverence for the laws, and respect to lawful authority, that it is not from a disloyal spirit and in contempt of the civil power, or from impatience of restraint, that they dissent from the national establishment, and exercise a right by which no one *can* be injured, though bigots may be offended, but because they are persuaded that conscience, and all

\* Palmer, pp. 37—59. Neal, vol. II. p. 663. De Laune's *Plea for the Noncon.* Twogood's letters. The *seven reasons* above do not apply equally to all the dissenters of those times; especially the first; but they were certainly the predominant ones; and are the reasons which influence nine tenths of the dissenters of the present day, who know any thing of their principles. † Neal vol. II. pp. 757—760.



things, purely of a religious nature, are subject to no jurisdiction but that of God; and that, in these matters, above all others, we are *to obey God rather than men*, on pain of his awful displeasure.

O that the church of Christ had been as happy in all other countries, as, for this last century it has been in this! But alas! the period of our release was the beginning of new sorrows to our brethren in most of the neighbouring countries.\* We cannot recollect their sufferings without anguish! The wild beasts of the forest have laid waste that beautiful vine that had taken deep root in many of the most populous countries of Europe! Tens of thousands—we might say hundreds of thousands—have suffered and bled, in France, in Germany, in Savoy, in Piedmont, and in other countries; and all that we have been able to do, has been to weep over their sufferings, and cry, *How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge, and avenge the blood of thy servants, on them that dwell on the earth!*†

Yes, God will hear the cry of his people, and the groans of his Israel in Egypt, and remember his covenant!—*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye need not that I should say any thing; for ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lords vengeance, on these enemies of his church, so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they shall say peace, and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.*—WATCH—again I say unto you, WATCH!—*the night is far spent; the day is at hand.*‡

\* Mosheim, vol. IV. pp. 484—489. † Rev. vi. 10.

‡ I. Thess. v. 1—3. Rom. xiii. 12. Dan. vii. 23—26. Rev. xi. 3, 17—19. xii. xiii. 5—10. xvi—xix. Christians! we live in awful times! awake, and give yourselves unto prayer. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves

My brethren, you have heard what sort of a kingdom Christ's is, and what the principles and conduct of the first christians were. We have hastily traced the corruptions of christianity; the progress of the grand apostacy, and of the reformation. This reformation originated from christians assuming the right of searching the scriptures, and judging for themselves, as to the mind of Christ taught in them. We claim the same right, and being persuaded that it is the bounden duty, of every christian, to conform to the mind of Christ, the directions of the New Testament, without regard to general practice, or human laws we aim at as near conformity to the perfect pattern which our Lord and his Apostles have given us, as we possibly can, and are therefore obliged to dissent from many of our fellow christians, whom we nevertheless love and honour; and, especially from national establishments because we think that, in them, an authority is assumed, at once injurious to the authority of Jesus Christ, and subversive of christian liberty; and in many respects, doctrines and ceremonies are imposed and an order of things enforced, which, we judge to be by no means consistent with the New Testament.

What do we learn from the New Testament respecting a Gospel church? We certainly read of no *national* churches, made up of the *mass* of the people. They were made up of a *separated, peculiar* people.\* They were *voluntary* societies, formed by mutual agreement. Hence we read, *And all the believers were together— with one accord—they had one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and were all made like unto men that wait for their Lord.* Luke xii. 35, 36.

\* See the 19th art. of the church of England, "The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered."

*to drink into one spirit.* We read of all the churches of the saints; of the churches of Judea; of the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, and of the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria; \* all of which were voluntary societies of persons believing in Christ, and associating for their mutual convenience and edification. †

These churches were distinguished from the civil societies of the world, by their *spiritual nature, end, and design.* The professed design of the members, was to come out from among the wicked, and be separate; not to be conformed to the world, but transformed a holy nation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The business, and privileges of these churches, were all of a spiritual nature. And whilst the business of civil society relates only to the *temporal* concerns of men; that of the churches of Christ, has respect only, to their *spiritual* concerns. The kingdom of Christ is neither opposed to, nor in connection with, the kingdoms of the world; but is opposed to the kingdom of darkness, the moral pollutions and wickedness of men, and the power of him that worketh in the children of disobedience. All that the civil magistrate has to do here, is to protect men in the peaceable exercise of their rights.

The chief ends of church fellowship, are the preservation of the faith, purity and worship of the Gospel; the enjoyment and support of religious ordinances, according to the appointment of Christ, for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of believers.

Hence the utility of a gospel ministry. *He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting*

\* Acts ii. 1. Eph. iv. 4, 5. I. Cor. xii. 13. xiv. 33. Gal. i. 22. Acts ix. 31. Rom. xvi. 5. Col. iv. 15.

† See the venerable Mr. Turner's *Compendium of Social Religion*, chap. 2. A book that I could wish to be in the hands of every christian.



*of the saints; for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ\*.*

But no man has a right to impose these pastors and teachers. They are to be freely chosen by the people, who are the sole judges of their qualifications, and of their abilities for their own particular edification. This right the churches of Christ universally exercised for some ages; till antichrist got a head, and the civil magistrate obtruded his authority, and thus the church became enslaved, debased and prostituted. Hence, even when an apostle was to be ordained, in the place of Judas, the disciples were assembled (*the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty*) and gave forth their lots†. In Acts xiv. 23. we read, *When they (Barnabas and Saul) had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord.* ORDAINED: that is, appointed with the suffrage, or lifting up of the hands of the people. The commission of Barnabas and Saul was extraordinary, and therefore we may suppose them to have exercised some extraordinary powers; but still the word implies the *choice*, or *consent* of the people. This is agreeable to Acts vi. 3, 5, 6. *Brethren look ye out from among you seven men of honest report—And the saying pleased the multitude, and they chose Stephen and Philip, etc. whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them.* That this right of choosing their own pastors and officers, and of regulating their own affairs, was exercised by all the churches of Christ, in the first ages, is placed beyond all controversy; for though many apologies have been invented for existing innovations, yet profane, as well as sacred history, is so clear, on this head, that scarcely any doubt it.† And what

\* Eph. iv. 11, 12.

† Acts i. 15—26.

† It was by Justinian's laws (about the year 534) that the inferior

right is of more importance? Let us therefore *stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free\**. And I beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain†.

people were wholly excluded from their right of suffrage in the choice of their bishops, etc. and the election confined to the *Optimates*, or persons of higher rank and quality. Just. Novel 123. c. 1. Bingham's Antiq. of the Christian Church, vol. II. p. 213.

\* Gal. v. 1.

† II. Cor. vi. 1.

## Postscript.

November 5, 1798.

WE have, in the foregoing pages, attempted briefly to trace the origin and progress of the grand apostacy; we have seen how the light of reformation first dawned on benighted christendom, and the progressive advancement that light has made. But, although the light has shone more and more, it is not yet advanced to the perfect day; nor are we to expect it to do so, till the providence of God has perfectly removed those civil and ecclesiastical corruptions which superstition and tyranny have opposed to truth and liberty—to the progress of genuine christianity, and the improvement of mankind. For our consolation, that same inspiration which forewarned the church of God, of antichristian corruptions and usurpations, has assured us of their termination; and given us some marks, by which we may form a pretty accurate judgment of the approach of this interesting period.

What is now passing, on the theatre of the world, is of so singular, so interesting, and of so awful a nature; and threatens to effect such general, and mighty revolutions, in the civil and ecclesiastical affairs of the world, that the church of Christ may well ask with great solicitude, *Watchman what*

*of the night? watchman what of the night? (Isa. xxi 11.)* So important are the events which we have lately seen; so critical the present moment of time; when the most stupendous events, with which the destinies of nations and empires are united, seem suspended as by a hair; that let party-spirited men, consider things as they may; sober, thinking christians, must necessarily be affected with serious reflections; nor can they help entertaining lively apprehensions about what God is effecting by those convulsions and revolutions which we witness; whether he may not, in his providence, be about to produce that great change in the political and moral world, of which his prophets have excited an expectation.

It is predicted of Jesus Christ that *he shall break all nations with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potters vessel, and that all people, nations and languages shall serve him.* This has never been yet accomplished. But seeing that all the governments, and all the churches, have in themselves the evident principles of corruption, and have, from age to age, accumulated on themselves, by their various crimes, great guilt, some more, and others less; and seeing that there is so little disposition in them thoroughly to repent and reform, we may naturally expect what the end will be; and, believing the word of God, we may be sure what it will be to them that *repent not of their murders, nor of their sorceries nor of their fornications, nor of their thefts.* Rev. ix. 21.

The interesting enquiry is, whether those commotions, which now shake the world, be not those judgments which are to dash to pieces the nations of the earth—to cleanse the sanctuary of God, and make way for the kingdom of Jesus Christ? I freely acknowledge my own convictions. I think they are. God, indeed, works in a way, and by means, which little accord with our prejudices, but the work is not, on this account, the less his: *Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it? Amos. iii. 6.* It is infidelity which seems employed to sweep clean the polluted sanctuary; and proud ambition which Providence directs for the execution



of his judgments. The destroyers of the earth fall by means worthy of their rise, and of the methods by which they have maintained their usurpations.

There are the most striking indications that we are hastening fast to an awful crisis. Faster, I believe, than most of us have suspected.

Although we should not take into particular consideration, the numerous reasons which have induced so many to conclude, that the *third woe*, (Rev. xi. 14.) which brings the ruin of all the enemies of Christ's kingdom, has certainly commenced; and though we should not be able to distinguish, exactly, the pouring out of the several *vials of the wrath of God*, (Rev. xvi.) to that which falls on *the seat of the Beast*; (ver. 10.) yet, the present movement in the east, taken in connection with the wonderful events of the last nine years, (considered in the most general way) and especially as immediately following the fall of the papal government—the exact order, I apprehend, marked out in the prophecy, Rev. xvi. 10–12.—strikingly intimates whereabouts we are, and what progress the judgments of God have made; namely, that we are just entering on the calamities of the *sixth vial of wrath*, which is to be poured out on the *great river Euphrates*, or the Ottoman empire.

Although I have always been of opinion that the *seven vials of wrath* (Rev. xvi.) would, though successive in their commencements, run into one another, and proceed together for some time, before they produced all their awful effects; yet, I am free to acknowledge that I expected the first four vials to have produced more decisive effects on their objects, before the pouring out of those on the papal and turkish governments, than they appear to have done. And particularly the *fourth vial*, which is poured on the *sun* (the civil despotism of the *beast's kingdom*); and I was partly led to this conclusion from an incorrect idea of that passage in Rev. xvii, 16. where it is said, *The ten horns shall hate the whore*, etc. not sufficiently distinguishing between the whorish church,

whose limits coextend with those of the Babylonish kingdom; and the papal government, confined within the narrower bounds of Rome and its territory—the *seat of the beast*. And which latter may perish, and that consequent darkness be spreading through all the beast's kingdom, which is to bring the nations to hate the whore, though most of the governments should still be her admirers and supporters. All that appears necessary for the accomplishment of this part of prophecy, is, that the pride of despotism should experience some remarkable humiliation subsequent to God's wrath on the rivers and fountains of water, and previous to the fall of the roman government; and this has, I think, been most evidently verified (as it respects Germany and Italy) since the conquests of the French in the vicinity of the Po. A humiliation that is likely to enrage despotism more than ever, and to bring on a delirium, that will end in its destruction. Rev. xvi. 8, 9. See my *Probable Progress of the Commotions of Europe* page 72—80.

As I hope ere long, when I shall have more leisure than I now have, to present to the public some thoughts on the fall of the papacy, the prospects of Turkey, the restoration of the Jews, &c I shall not now detain the reader; but only observe, without attempting to demonstrate, that, if we are not mistaken in our opinion about the commencement of the *sixth vial of wrath*, then we may expect the kingdom of the beast to be rapidly filling with darkness; and the war with Turkey to proceed fast to the utter ruin of that monstrous tyranny. We may also expect soon to see a very general combination among the friends of the *Dragon*, the *beast* and the *false prophet*; for immediately on the pouring out of the sixth vial of wrath, John adds (Rev. xvi. 13.) *And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs (the symbols of impostors), come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet—which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that*

*great day of God Almighty!*—May our long favoured country stand aloof from this fatal combination, and be far from this battle—this dangerous warfare—against the providence of God! May peace be within her walls, and prosperity in all her dwellings!

The harvest appears to be past, and preparation to be making for the vintage, Rev. xiv. If so, an awful time is to be expected; *such a time of trouble as never was, since there was a nation*, Dan. xii. 1. Rev. xvi. 18—21. Now we are to be looking for the restoration of the scattered Jews, and who, it is likely, will become principal actors, in the dreadful scene: Zec. xii. To pretend to determine, positively, *how* this is to be brought about, would be arrogance; the probability is that the Turkish power being overturned in Palestine, by some invading enemy, that enemy will think it politic and necessary, for the promotion of its own schemes, to invite the Jews to take possession of their ancient patrimony, and to make one cause with themselves. For, without the support of some powerful nation, how are the dispersed, disorganized Jews, to collect their numbers and unite their energies, so as to produce the effects predicted? We know God can work miracles; but we know also that he usually works by second causes.

I shall now only add that Egypt, it is probable, will be an easy conquest, (Isa. xi.) and a thoroughfare for the returning sons of Abraham, to the country of their ancestors. The winepress is to be trodden *without the city*, (Rev. xiv. 20.) that is, if the great Babylonish city be intended, as I think must be the case, a dreadful warfare is to be carried on without the territory of the beast; (some think in Palestine) and which will end in the utter overthrow of the antichristian party, and, eventually, in an entire change in the moral and political world.

Remember, Reader, who it is that, at this critical moment, says, (Rev. xvi. 15.) **BEHOLD I COME AS A THIEF! BLESSED IS HE THAT WATCHETH!**

The End





